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Subject: BARBOUR CRIES MEDICAID WOLF

Mississippi Health Advocacy Program

Barbour Cries Medicaid Wolf

Barbour and Nunnelee Manufacture Medicaid Budget Deficit

JACKSON, Miss- Governor Haley Barbour and Senator Alan Nunnelee's attempt to cut Mississippi's Medicaid budget by \$60 million continues a pattern of weakening our State's safety net. From removing 65,000 elderly and disabled beneficiaries from the Medicaid rolls in 2004, to now threatening access to healthcare for 600,000 beneficiaries, Governor Barbour has been consistent in his lack of concern for our most vulnerable populations.

The protracted debate over the budget also puts at risk the existence of Mississippi's Medicaid program. The state's health care safety net will expire June 30th if it is not reauthorized by the Legislature. Failure to extend the program would threaten the healthcare of hundreds of thousands of Mississippians and the solvency of rural hospitals.

Currently, Senate and House negotiators are meeting to put together a state budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1. Barbour, in concert with Nunnelee, is attempting to manufacture a \$60 million budget hole by holding back the money from this year's Medicaid budget.

The \$60 million is a part of funds provided through the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (Federal Stimulus) passed and signed into law by the Federal government in February 2009. The Federal Stimulus provided Mississippi with \$750 million to fund the Medicaid program during these worsening economic times.

Barbour is attempting to forgo spending those federal dollars for Medicaid in his quest to cut health care for children and the elderly. Legislators have questioned the legality of the Governor's plan noting that stimulus dollars

were designed to be spent immediately to foster the economy and to provide a safety net to those hurt in this recession.

Nunnelee, the senate's lead negotiator on the budget, is pushing Barbour's plan to create a deficit although he acknowledges it would lead to the layoffs of "thousands of state workers, including highway patrolmen and Health Department nurses.

"Although the money is there to fund Medicaid, the Governor would rather create a deficit that would lead to Medicaid cuts and hurt access to health care for working Mississippians struggling in this recession," said Roy Mitchell, Program Director of the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program.

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